CPRN RCRPP
Fresh Ideas for Canada's Future

e-network

No White Knight For Sustainable Cities

Friday, April 2, 2004 – We often used to think of successful cities in terms of single dimensions – in terms of their ability to attract industrial growth, the average income of their citizens, their physical appeal, their safety, their air quality, their sports teams, or their night life.

Today, we understand that all these dimensions are related, and there are many other dimensions besides – things like an ethos of innovation, active private and community organizations, equitably shared infrastructure, an inclusive and active citizenry – all of which contribute to a city's long-term viability and success.

Similarly, when it came to responsibility for the economic and social health of cities, we approached it piecemeal, with various levels of government and various departments approaching their responsibilities in isolation from each other, and with the public, private and non-profit sectors acting independently of each other.

Today, we know that won't do. It is wasteful, ineffective and we can't afford more of the same in the face of an increasingly competitive global economy. No department, or government, can succeed without integrating its efforts with those of other actors. There is no solitary white knight, only the tough task of collaboration and coordination.

This is the topic of a recent presentation by Judith Maxwell, CPRN's President, in the Library of Parliament's Speaker Series. In ***Public Policy for Cities: The Role of the Federal Government***, she reviews the poor fit between traditional approaches to cities and the current requirement for what she calls "place-specific" policies.

Maxwell argues for new ways to share power, resources and responsibility for cities among governments at all levels and private and community players. She favours a process driven by local actors from the bottom-up, and supported by local federal officers with delegated authority. The federal government, she says, should think in terms of a "menu of possibilities" for programs to be tailored to local needs.

Maxwell believes an agreement on multi-level governance, "based on the spirit of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA)" is the important "next step" on the road to policies for sustainable cities in Canada

To access or download a copy of her presentation, click here.

e-network e-network work e-network e-net